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ABSTRACT

The introduction of poetry into psychotherapy in the Western (European American) tradition and a growing interest in connections between the fine arts and the healing arts have prompted investigations of the parallel uses of poetry in other cultures. Examples of how three native American groups (Oglala Sioux, Piman, and Navaho) have used poetry in healing illustrate the power of language, the content and structure of healing poems, and the comparative use, construction, and performance of native American poetry relevant to Western theories. A great deal more remains to be said about the function of language, especially poetry, in the healing practices and theories of different cultures. Much can be learned by investigating the education and qualifications of the poet, the content and standards of individual poems and sequences of songs, and changes in ceremonial practices in response to new needs within the culture. The introduction of poetry into Western psychotherapeutic practice, if it is to be successful, can well benefit from the sophisticated theories and techniques developed by cultures that prize the value, power, and beauty of the word. (RL)

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A Word Has Power: Poetry and Healing in American Indian Cultures

The healing utterance is as old as our records of poetry itself. Curing by incantation and the power of language to heal are recorded in ancient literature. My own researches in oral literary forms in North America indicate physical and psychological restoration of the person to be a primary function of literature in Native American cultures. Now, the introduction of poetry into psychotherapy in the Western (European-American) tradition, and a growing interest in connections between the fine arts and the healing arts (15), prompt investigation of parallel uses of poetry in other cultures. This paper draws on examples from three native American groups: the Oglala Sioux and related great plains tribes, Piman groups of southern Arizona and northern Mexico, and the Navahos of northern Arizona and New Mexico. The discussion focusses on three major concerns: the power of language; the composition, performance and publication of poetry with comparisons to relevant Western theories; and the content and structure of healing poems.

Language and Power

The power inherent in language lies at the root of poetry's curative potency in American Indian theory. The same observation must be made about conventional psychotherapy in the European tradition, which uses language as its primary medium. Indeed, the first term for what is now called psychanalysis was the "talking cure." The contemporary Kiowa poet and novelist

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N. Scott Momaday observes that "a word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things. By means of words can a man deal with the world on equal terms. And the word is sacred." (16) Through poetry--chant, incantation, song or prayer--both the individual and the cosmos are controlled, regenerated and maintained in harmonious order. Seeds germinate, rain comes, the sun reappears, animals sacrifice themselves to the hunter, and evil or alien elements are driven from the body and mind.

The language most highly charged with power is the formalized discourse of ritual, structured in song, chant and prayer and accompanied by music, dance and visual creations. Although the word is primary, a distinctive feature of American Indian and other oral poetry is that it is sung or intoned. While linguists may differ as to whether a given text is prosodically a chant or a song (22), for our purposes the words "poem" and "song" refer to the same thing: an utterance formally structured according to the artistic precepts of the particular language and culture. Because ritual healing is essentially religious, virtually all the songs used for this purpose can also be called prayers. (I am reserving the term "chant" here to designate the intricate Navaho ceremonials.) (32)

The importance of the word, the poem, is preeminent in medical practice among the groups I discuss here. The crucial aspect of Navaho chantway practice is singing, and while practitioners have been called "medicine men" they are more properly termed "singers." Knowledge of and ability to perform the hundreds of songs and prayers that may be required in a single ceremony supersedes all other aspects of the ritual. No matter how adept the singer may be at sand-painting, body-painting, prayersticks, herbal

remedies or other ceremonial elements, it is knowledge of the songs which is a measure of his ability to cure patients. (33) A piman shaman of extraordinary ability, Owl Woman, is reported to have placed the same emphasis on words. She could cure without singing, by means of herbal and other remedies, but song was the treatment of choice. (8)

The regenerative power of language to "give origin to all things" by naming them prevails as well in the Judao-Christian tradition, as evidenced in the creation myth at the beginning of the book of Genesis, where light is brought into being by means of the utterance "Let there be light." A Yuman poem offers a similar perspective on the power of the word:

> The deer is taking away the daylight.
>
> After taking away the daylight he named it Darkness. (6)

The poetic-critic Ezra Pound spoke of language as being "charged" or "energized" in one of three ways to create either phanopoeia (poetry of image), melopoeia (poetry of music) or logopoeia (poetry of intellect and language). (19) The text given above stands as an illustration of Pound's phanopoeia. Indeed, one of the most immediately striking and appealing aspects of Indian poetry in translation is the vividness and acute observation of natural phenomena in its imagery. The function of poetry in healing (and other) ceremonies, however, seems more related to the quality of melopoeia. Following Pound, critic Andrew Welsh relates melopoeia specifically to charms, that is, to the use of poetry to effect a limited and concrete result such as recovering a lost object, healing a wound or capturing prey. "We arrive, finally, at the second sense in which poetry can make things present by naming them. At the roots of phanopoeia, naming is a structure of vision and knowledge, and phanopoeia's way of making things present is

to bring time and process into the present tense of the Image. At the roots of melopoeia, naming is a power directed at causing effects, bringing things from there to here or hurling them from here to there." (31)

The concept of language as action may be more immediate in a preliterate culture than it is with people who have writing, which preserves words in a kind of frozen stasis without reference to speaker or listener. Without writing, however, words exist as concrete manifestations only in the act of being spoken. Twentieth-century Euro-Americans are used to thinking visually, as MacLuhan likes to remind us. In speaking of poetry, especially of English or American poetry after the Imagist movement in the early part of the twentieth century, people commonly identify poetry with imagery, and even assume many times that all poetry is or ought to be comprised of images. But the voiced word, the performance, is primary in American Indian theory and practice. Hence the inclusion--as in charms in all languages--of archaic, foreign or nonsense words. It is the utterance itself, its music (or noise, if you will), that is causative. Unfortunately, the very qualities of sound which make the poems melodic are precisely what disappear in translation. Puns, alliteration, rhyme, and all sorts of word play are virtually impossible to render in another language, not to mention the special characteristics of verse in languages that are tonal. What is remarkable is the measure of energy that does remain, even sometimes in the crudest of renderings.

Composition

The profound importance attached to language, especially ritual language, informs the Indian attitude toward the composition, performance and publication of poetry. Some present-day practitioners of Western psychotherapy

believe that poetic composition can itself be a curative process, assisting the person to articulate and resolve unique intrapsychic conflicts, and therefore self-expressiveness, spontaneity and innovation are highly prized. Such values do not obtain in traditional theories of poetic composition among American Indians.

In traditional Indian culture, poetic composition, at least of medicine poems, is not undertaken lightly. The Oglalas, in common with other plains tribes, undertook a lengthy and elaborate vision quest ceremony intended to result in visionary experience and the bestowal of sacred power on the seeker. Lamenting, or crying for a vision, was long, rigorous and complicated, involving collection of materials for and construction of a sweat lodge, purification by sweating and herbs, fire building, chanting and so on, all accomplished according to minutely detailed rubrics. (5) If the seeker was favored, the observance culminated in a message in vision and song granted by some power or powers of the universe--an animal, a natural force such as lightning, or tribal ancestors. By this process the individual received direction, inspiration and assistance in making decisions or following a course of action in life. The unique song or songs received during the vision become a talisman, a kind of mantram, of identity and personal integration. (20)

In rare instances a highly gifted individual may have such a visionary experience spontaneously. In other cases the individual's personal vision may be of such complexity and power as to form the origin for an entirely new ceremony. One such person was the Oglala holy man named Black Elk, who described his vision and its subsequent ritualization at length. (18) Black Elk also attributed the origin of the Oglala Sun Dance to the vision of a

man named Kablaya. (18)

A present-day Oglala Yuwipi, or healer, derives his power from the source of song in his dream and may call himself by a name related to that source, such as "Bear Curer" or "Eagle Curer." The healer's power, however, remains in the songs he has received. The Yuwipi is also expected to undertake a Hanblecheyapi, as the vision quest ritual is called, once a year. (20) Thus the healer-poet is a specialist in his field who masters techniques of ecstasy to cure himself and others. (4)

The Papago (and related Pima) Indians of southwest Arizona and northern Mexico have a strong shamanistic tradition but do not appear to practice a formal vision quest ceremony. Dreams, however, are a major source of important knowledge, such as lore on the curative powers of plants and the preparation and application of medicinal substances. As in the other tribes, animals, natural phenomena, or supernatural beings can impart medicine songs to an individual. (28, 30) One remarkable Papago shaman, called Owl Woman, learned her songs from the dead in what appear to be spontaneous and rather causual visionary experiences. At a time when she was grieving for her husband and relatives, she was suddenly carried off by spirits to the land of the dead, where a number of her relatives came forward and spoke with her. After this experience she several times encountered spirits of people newly dead. In each case, the spirit she met taught her one or more songs, which she then used in her practice. (8) Other Papago practitioners use songs learned from another singer, but whose origin is almost always finally traceable to dream or spiritual visitation. (30)

These examples illustrate a distinctive feature of the composing process

as it is perceived within the cultures referred to: the poet does not, and is not expected to, give any conscious direction to his or her material. Neither are poems felt to be the reflection of unconscious material unique to the composer. Poems can be intensely personal, the personal and inalienable property of the individual, but they are not self-conscious or self-expressive, not manifestations of personality. In this respect, traditional theories of poetic composition among American Indians differ radically from many Western schools of thought.

However, although the composing processes here described do not seem to incorporate the conscious manipulation of material that we associate with form and discipline, the vision quest itself, with its many exacting requirements, constitutes a rigorous discipline. Even in the case of spontaneous visions or dreams in cultures without the quest, prescriptions for the use of songs are many and precise. The individual who follows the ritual demands of the quest is provided with the culture's forms--its poetic idiom--and indeed much of the poetry is extremely formulaic. In contrast to the criteria of some Western poetic theories--and especially to those theories emphasizing individual self-expression which have most influenced psychoanalytic uses of poetry--the composition of traditional poetry among American Indians is neither casual nor spontaneous nor innovative.

Performance

The performance of poetry exhibits the same care and concern that surround its composition. Words of such tremendous power that they can affect the functioning of the cosmos are not to be uttered lightly. An ubiquitous theme is the double valence of power, which is efficacious for good or evil, depending on its use. Theories of disease and the source of illness regard the same agent as both cause and cure. Ghosts, witches,

holy beings, animals or natural forces can be responsible for illness. (20, 33) The sick person may have broken a taboo or accidentally transgressed a rule or even merely come in contact with a highly charged object. In any case, the aim of diagnostic procedures that precede any attempt to cure, by means of ritual or otherwise, is to locate the offended and offending being and determine the remedy to be attempted. Treatment is then directed toward compelling that being to leave off injuring the patient and, instead, to use its power for the benefit of the individual and even of the whole tribe. (26, 22, 8, 32)

Songs received from animals, as was common among the Oglalas, or from the dead, as in the case of Owl Woman, were specifics against diseases produced by those particular animals or by ghosts, respectively. The same concept is reported among the Navaho, where, for instance, the Mountain Chant is closely associated with bears and the many disasters they are responsible for. A person who has had contact with a bear and has survived is therefore an ideal candidate to perform this ceremonial. (17)

The song, then, produces the power of the being that is invoked, and immense care must be taken to see that the power functions for good rather than evil. Improper or imperfectly understood use of the material can cause great damange. Washington Matthews, whose early studies of Navaho ceremonial practices remain among the best accounts and most graceful translations we have, was thought to have been deafened and paralyzed as a consequence of his many years of study of the Night Chant, which is specific for blindness, deafness, paralysis and insanity. (3)

Traditional methods and styles and correctness of performance are therefore the highest priorities. The Oglala vision quest must be undertaken

only with the aid of experienced and knowledgeable guides; otherwise evil will ensure, like a snake wrapping itself around thelamenter. (5) Among the Papago, people other than the practitioner might join in singing songs during a ceremony, in order to add their portion of power to the total performance. However, even though many people might know the songs, they sang only under the direction of the practitioner. (8)

Numerous investigators document the strict adherence to prescribed form in the Navaho ceremonials, which may last up to nine nights and include hundreds of songs, in addition to dances, sand and body painting, construction and manipulation of fetish objects, ritual bathing and emesis, and smoking. Again, error in performance--that is, omissions, interpolations, innovation of any kind--equals lack of control of the powers invoked, who will then act to injure rather than to assist the patient. Formulas exist for the rectification of mistakes, but mistakes are possible in the recitation of those formulas as well. (14, 24) Every chanter is aware of the dangers of falling into an irreversible pattern of error, of becoming trapped in a closed "circle of evil" and going fire-crazy, like the moth unable to control either itself or the fire toward which it is drawn. (22) This emphasis on adherence to form has prompted the observation that while illnesses tend toward hysterical manifestations, control of illness is obtained by means best described as obsessive-compulsive. (25)

As with poetic composition, performance of the song seems to leave little room for innovation or the expression of personality. The poet neither selects nor consciously shapes his or her material, and the performer is not free to tinker with prescribed forms or to introduce innovations in practice. The same values apply to the patient's behaviour. In the Oglala vision

quest the seeker may be a patient looking for the answer to a problem or seeking guidance in life, or he may be a Yuwipi intent on maintaining his powers. In either case, the unique and personal benefits of the rite occur (if they do occur) only when the performance follows prescribed procedures exactly. In the Oglala curing ritual itself patients may dance or not as they wish (20), but correctness of performance by the patient is not so paramount as has been reported for Navaho ceremonies. (22)

Nevertheless, some practitioners are regarded as better than others (20), and some ceremonies are maintained while others become obsolescent. (33) In some cases, the artistic merits of performance are recognized and appreciated quite apart from other functions, but such distinctions are usually related to degenerate forms of rites. (25) For the most part, esthetic and functional qualities are either interdependent or the same: a beautiful poem is one that works, and an efficacious poem is likewise artistically pleasing. Thus an empirical testing of material does go on, with quality of composition and performance a matter for traditional and individual judgment. Such is not yet true of poetry used in Western psychotherapeutic practice. Very little empirical research has been undertaken, and what does exist betrays scant knowledge of literary concepts. (2)

Publication

Respect for the power of language, especially of ritual language, extends to any kind of publication. Momaday says that the Kiowas regarded names as the most personal of property: "A man's name is his own; he can keep it or give it away as he likes." (16) Kiowa tradition forbade uttering the name of a dead person, for the dead were said to take their names with

them to the afterworld. To speak the name would be to invoke the person's ghost, as with a charm, and the presence of a ghost was the last thing to be wished for. (16) The same respect for appropriate circumstances of publication extends to poetry.

In general, the publication or transmission of poetry was done cautiously, with reluctance, and generally at a price, even in those cases where the singer wished to transmit a ceremony to prevent its dying out. An Oglala colleague of mine has said that Black Elk was severely criticized by other members of his tribe for repeating his vision to John Niehardt. Among the Navaho, a singer may be reluctant to teach his songs for reasons similar to those of the Oglalas who criticized Black Elk. Dispersal of the texts to more and more people weakens their power to control the cosmic forces. (22)

Publication or teaching of ceremonial rubrics also risks the unleashing of the powers the words invoke, and must be accomplished under circumstances rather trying for the apprentice. One writer has said that prayers can be learned only during an actual performance, and then must be memorized in their entirety, with no going back to repeat or correct lines. (22) Another observer describes sand paintings as being taught only figure by figure, with directions as to placement but never a complete model. (17)

In Papago practice, it seems to have been customary for shamans to teach songs to assistants, who then did the actual singing during the ritual. (8) Nevertheless, the owner maintained control of the song and its use. (30)

Content and Structure

The content and structure of healing poems reflect medical theory and world-view as well as artistic precepts in each culture. A particularly large number of medicine poems are available from the Pima, a group nearly

identical in language and mythology to the Papago. A single example, a "gopher song," illustrates some characteristics of this type of poem which are common to other cultures as well.

In the reddish glow of nightfall,
    In the reddish glow of nightfall
I return to my burrow,
    About which the flowers bloom.

With the four eagle feathers,
    With the four eagle feathers,
I stir the air. When I turn
    My magic power is crossed.

And I make hills of soft earth;
    And I make hills of soft earth.
My breath withers all before it;
    My breath withers all before it. (6)

The song, which is specific for stomach trouble in children, baffles the non-Piman reader until its purpose and context are understood. (23) When reading many ceremonial poems, the non-Indian reader faces the challenge of trying to reconstruct the ceremonial situation of the poem's performance, as well as attempting to visualize the objects pictured in the imagery. Here, the reader must not only imagine the gopher, who is depicted as saying the words about himself, but also try to visualize a singer/dancer performing gestures prescribed for the treatment being conducted. Lines 1-4 and 9-10 render observations of natural phenomena in describing an actual gopher's behaviour, while the middle stanza refers to the singer's actions as he waves

feathers in the air during the performance.

Paraphernalia used in this particular cure include deerskin bags containing tufts of eagle down, together with twigs that had been cut by a gopher and earth from a gopher mound, all to be pressed on the sick child's stomach. (23) Thus, imagistic references in the poem to earth and eagle feathers are realized concretely as well. The final two lines express the power of the gopher, which has caused this illness. This power is invoked by the song: the singer identifies himself with the malicious being and so brings power under control and turns it around to make it beneficial. All this happens through the words and gestures of the rite. "When I turn my magic power is crossed." The song is a charm: its purpose is specific and limited, like a pill. (31) Most of the poetry and practices I have described here, however, are more holistic in approach, aimed at a restoration of the entire individual and even a readjustment in the cosmic order.

Even songs so personal as the plains Indians' dream songs reflect the prevailing cultural idioms. A dream song said to have belonged to a Teton Sioux named Siyaka illustrates several characteristics of plains culture and of traditional verse forms:

At night may I roam
Against the winds may I roam
At night may I roam
When the owl is hooting
May I roam.

At dawn may I roam
Against the winds may I roam
At dawn may I roam

When the crow is calling

May I roam. (10)

The song is formulaic in its use of repetition and parallelism, patterning owl with night and crow with dawn. Strophic organization is strong, with eight of the ten lines ending in the phrase "may I roam"--an emphatic expression of the plains peoples' nomadic life. Roaming "against the winds" (repeated twice) suggests the strength and individuality cultivated among the Sioux (12), as well as the harsh climate of the northern plains. Owl and crow both figure prominently in Indian mythologies. Nevertheless, the song is unique, and permeated with the poet's sense of his own identity. It illustrates the way in which extremely rigid form can be a vehicle for the most personal of expressions.

Similarly, a pair of Pawnee songs that belonged to a man named Man Chief, who received them during a storm, express intense individualism by means of cultural formulae. (9)

1.

I stood there, I stood there,

The clouds are speaking.

I say, "You are the ruling power,

I do not understand, I only know what I am told,

You are the ruling power, you are now speaking,

This power is yours, O heavens."

2.

It is there that our hearts are set,

In the expanse of the heavens. (1)

Although not so obviously formulaic as the Teton Sioux songs, Man Chief's

personal expression reflects the plains Indians' preoccupation with and orientation outward to the sky, horizon and celestial phenomena--what one writer calls the culture's "centrifugality." (12)

The songs received from ghosts by the Papago shaman Owl Woman exemplify the ambivalent nature of power. Spirits of the dead are agents of mischief and evil, intensely feared in many tribes. Among the Papago they are one of the two possible causes of insanity, which is treated primarily by song ceremonial. (8) Thus Owl Woman, having personal contact with the dead, had access to a particularly potent fund of energy. Even in translation the songs retain much impact, as in the following example.

How shall I begin my songs
In the blue night that is settling?

In the great night my heart will go out,
Toward me the darkness comes rattling.
In the great night my heart will go out. (7)

This song was sung at the commencement of Owl Woman's ritual, which consisted of a night-long procedure divided into four phases, each with its prescribed sequence of songs. The text refers to this opening of the ceremony, and also to the event enacted in the rite: the shaman's own journey to the land of the dead--her heart going out--from which she returned with the sick person's soul. The four parts of the journey are conceptualized as setting out (evening, the "night that is settling"), going on (night), arrival (midnight) and return (dawn). The songs associated with each part refer to the time of night and also to the geography of the spirit land and its inhabitants. (8)

Implicit in Papago theory of disease is the notion of possession. The

person's soul or psyche is under the control of, or said to be in the land of, the offended or michievous alien power. (29) This sense of lostness, alienation and distraction is expressed in another Papago poem.

Where the mountain crosses,
On top of the mountain,
I do not myself know where.
I wandered where my mind and my heart seemed to be lost.
I wandered away. (1)

While the usual apparatus of shamanism (sleight-of-hand, disease-bearing crystals, and so on) has been reported for Papago practitioners (27), Owl Woman seems to have worked almost entirely by way of the trance-journey.

By far the most intricate and highly elaborated ceremonial system extant is that of the Navahos. (32) Unlike the shamans of other tribes, Navaho chanters are not necessarily individuals specially endowed with visionary insight or direct personal access to superhuman powers. A singer, rather, is one who has made the decision to study and has learned one or more chants, a process which usually takes years. Talent, intelligence and vocation are recognized, rather than mystical attributes. (24) The singer must commit to memory several hundred songs and prayers in their sequence, as well as learn to make drypaintings, herbal potions for sweat and emesis, and other apparatus. (17)

The primary and overriding value for Navahos is control and balance. A ceremony as a whole, as well as individual songs within each part, and even the words themselves, reflect this concern. Some words will attract good and others drive away evil, while still others may do both depending on their context. (22) The chants themselves are classified as belonging

to "holyway" or "peaceway" groups for the attraction of blessings, or conversely as part of "evilway" or "injuryway" practice, aimed at exorcism. However, because of the ultimate concern for balance, each ceremony contains both exorcistic/cleansing and attractive/healing elements. (32, 33)

The Night Chant, a nine-day holyway ceremony, is divided into a four-night purification sequence followed by a four-night healing sequence and culminates in a night-long dance integrating all aspects of the rite. During each night, prayers and rituals of exorcism alternate with those of healing. The same balance appears within individual poems, as in this prayer from the third morning prayer ritual, which is a rite primarily attractive/healing in its focus..

Tsegihi!
House made of the dawn.
House made of evening light.
House made of the dark cloud.
House made of male rain.
House made of dark mist.
House made of female rain.
House made of pollen.
House made of grasshoppers.
Dark cloud is at the door.
The trail out of it is dark cloud.
The zigzag lightning stands high up on it.
Male deity!
Your offering I make.
I have prepared a smoke for you.

Restore my feet for me.

Restore my legs for me.

Restore my body for me.

Restore my mind for me.

Restore my voice for me.

This very day take out your spell for me.

Your spell remove for me.

You have taken it away for me.

Far off it has gone.

Happily I recover.

Happily my interior becomes cool.

Happily I go forth.

My interior feeling cold, may I walk.

No longer sore, may I walk.

Impervious to pain, may I walk.

With lively feelings, may I walk.

As it used to be long ago, may I walk.

Happily may I walk.

Happily with abundant dark clouds may I walk.

Happily with abundant showers may I walk.

Happily with abundant plants may I walk.

Happily on a trail of pollen may I walk.

Happily may I walk.

Being as it used to be long ago, may I walk.

May it be beautiful before me.

May it be beautiful behind me.

May it be beautiful below me.

May it be beautiful above me.

May it be beautiful all around me.

In beauty it is finished.

In beauty it is finished. (3)

The first part of the prayer consists of fifteen lines of invocation followed by seven of exorcism directing the power to remove evil from every part of the patient's body. The two lines in the middle are a pivot:

You have taken it away from me.

Far off it has gone.

The remaining lines assert that health is regained and the person is revitalized. In accordance with Navaho passion for balance and symmetry the prayer is chanted four times, twice to male and twice to female deities.

Thorough analysis of the poem would require tracing a complex of linguistic, mythological and symbolic references. Pollen, to mention only one element, can have as many as fourteen significations; among them are divine food, medicine, inner essence or spirit, or tangible manifestation of a minor deity. (21) Here, we may simply note that the poem culminates in an expression of centering, whereby the patient is restored to harmonious relationship with himself and with the cosmos--is placed "in beauty" at the center of the universe.

In another song from the Night Chant, the patient is identified with one of the semi-divine personages in the governing myth.

The Slayer of the Alien Gods,

Then now am I.

The Bearer of the Sun

Arises with me,

Journeys with me,

Goes down with me,

Abides with me,

But sees me not. (3)

The Bearer of the Sun is the planet Venus, morning and evening star, as it travels alongside the sun across the heavens during the day. Slayer of the Alien Gods, or Monster-Slayer, is the child of earth and sun, often invoked in rites of exorcism like the one this song is taken from. (3) The chanter makes the identification on behalf of the patient, who is then endowed with the power of the god and therefore able to control the power and benefit from its energizing strength. The same kind of identification is presumed to take place as the patient touches or sits on the drypaintings or paints her or his body to resemble that of the holy person. (22)

The governing myths in Navaho chants often involve the deliverance of the hero from danger, disease or other evil, with victory and return from peril. Such is the story, for instance, of Monster Slayer mentioned in the song above. Often the hero has transgressed in some way, thus collaborating in having brought the trouble on himself. By being identified with the hero, the patient intends to be delivered in the same way that the hero was. (26) The prayers and songs effect this identification, permitting correction of error through control and restoration of appropriate harmony. (22) In contrast to the intense immediacy of the shaman's trancelike experience of the journey to the spirit land, in the Navaho ceremonial idiom the journey is displaced and elaborated into myth. The process is materially richer, more formalized, and more public. The contrast between the shaman's

performance and the Navaho ceremony can be paralleled to the difference between the intensity and ecstatic energy of an evangelical conversion experience, versus the intricate and subtle rhythms of a solemn high mass.

A great deal more remains to be said about the function of language, and of peotry, in the healing practices and theories of different cultures. I believe, as well, that there is much to learn from investigation of such matters as the education and qualifications of the poet, the content and standards of individual poems and sequences of songs, and changes in ceremonial practice in response to new needs within the culture. The introduction of poetry into Western psychotherapeutic practice, if it is to be successful, can well benefit from the sophisticated theories and techniques developed by cultures that prize the value and power and beauty of the word.

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